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Release of Kennedy Death Files Costs FBI $187,643

WASHINGTON (UPI)—The FBI says the release of 80,000 pages of its files on the John F. Kennedy assassination is costing taxpayers $187,643.

The FBI will release 40,001 pages Wednesday, and the rest in January, in response to requests made under the Freedom of Information Act by about 60 organizations and individuals.

The cost estimate includes salaries of clerical personnel who searched for the documents, special agents and officials who censored exempted information and rental of photo reproduction machines, a spokesman said.

"Based on this, we conservatively estimate the cost involved up to the present time to be $187,643," he said.

This figure does not include the cost of making copies for those who want to buy them instead of reading the files at FBI headquarters. The FBI covers that cost by charging 10 cents a page, a price set by Congress.

News organizations purchasing full sets Wednesday will have to pay $4,000.10 each.

Although this is one of the FBI's biggest releases, its cost is small compared with the overall expense of handling the thousands of requests that the FBI receives each year and must respond to in compliance with the law.

"For fiscal 1977 (which ended Sept. 30) the complete figures are not in but it is estimated freedom of information requests cost $9.1 million," the spokesman said. A total of 379 employes, including 54 agents, are working on the requests.

Before 1975, the FBI had received only 511 requests. But between January, 1975, and Feb. 25, 1977, it received 32,202 requests.

Director Clarence M. Kelley said last March that the FBI had run up 20,063 hours of overtime in trying to handle this "mountain of paperwork."

To wipe out a backlog representing about 8.5 million pages of documents, Kelley began Operation Onslaught, which consisted of bringing in two successive groups of up to 200 agents each from across the country between May and October.

Onslaught cost $2.8 million, the FBI said. It made possible the release last Nov. 21 of 52,648 pages of heavily censored FBI files on 15 years of activities aimed at disrupting extremist organizations in a once-secret program named Cointelpro.

The Cointelpro release was a belated response to a request filed on Nov. 18, 1974, by 10 news organizations.

A tide of new requests has continued to roll in, the FBI said. During fiscal 1977 the FBI received 15,658 requests. But requests that formerly took 10 to 14 months to fill are now filled in about a month, the FBI said.